



VOLUME 4 ISSUE 2

The International Journal of

Religion and Spirituality in Society

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THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIETY

www.religioninsociety.com

First published in 2014 in Champaign, Illinois, USA
by Common Ground Publishing
University of Illinois Research Park
2001 South First St, Suite 202
Champaign, IL 61820 USA

www.CommonGroundPublishing.com

ISSN: 2154-8633

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The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

Conflict Resolution Forms in the Life of Prophet Muhammad

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the life and leadership skills of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to discover conflict resolution forms that may offer solutions to contemporary global problems and challenges faced by the world's nations. This essay also aims to contribute to world peace and interfaith dialogues by illustrating the exemplary character of this persona, which little is known about outside the Islamic sphere. Particular attention is paid to the key attributes a successful leader must possess and examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) are given. From the evidence available to us, it is clear that he showed great respect for other faiths, cultures, and ideas; even when he didn't agree with particular opinions, he listened with tolerance and care. He served the truth and opposed that which was untruthful and life-destroying, such as self-destructive habits, addictions, and immorality. It is concluded that one of the greatest legacies of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is his respect for people of other religions, cultures, and ethnicities and an appreciation of the dignity of all living beings irrespective of their gender, race, or societal status.

Keywords: Tolerance, Dialogue, Interfaith, Respect, Islam, Prophet Muhammad, Globalization, Conflict Resolution, Leader, Religion, Peace, World Peace, Faith

Introduction

Today's world, made increasingly small through globalization and technology-enabled connectivity, is clouded by conflict, wars, hatred and negative forces. There is an unquestionable need for a true leader who is able to fulfill the hope and aspirations of individuals, groups of followers and communities, whilst respecting the followers of other faiths, people of diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds. In an ideal world, all people should be able to live peacefully together, without fights or discrimination but in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect. However, it seems that contrary to this ideal, some individuals, groups and governments, rather than acknowledging this, hold their own aims, ambitions and values as more important than the rights of others, dictating and discriminating against them, resulting in significant and avoidable problems for society. We have witnessed throughout history, leaders who implement their power in an oppressive manner, prohibiting, punishing and even torturing their subjects as a means to solving their perceived problems. This method of rule may effect immediate solutions but is in itself the root cause of further problems. We can see from the life of Prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him/pbuh) that he himself exemplified a universal principle of good leadership by sharing in the labors, dangers and hardships of his people which in turn inspired them to overcome their problems.¹ Islam takes justice and world peace as a basis: "Let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice."² Greeting and wishing safety and security upon others is considered one of the most beneficial acts in Islam.³ Peace is in fact of utmost importance to Islam. In that respect, if an environment of peace cannot be established in this world, it would be impossible for the human race to perform acts of good service for society or humanity.

In this essay, I endeavor to examine the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) from this perspective and identify some cases from his life that may offer solutions to contemporary global problems and challenges. A good starting point is defining the qualities and characteristics we

¹ John Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, (London & Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2010), 77.

² Qur'ān 5: 8 (the translations of the quoted verses are taken from) Ali Ünal, *The Qur'an with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English*, 1 vols. (New Jersey, USA: The Light, Inc., 2008).

³ Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān ibn al-Ash'ath, *Sunan Abū Dāwūd*, Imara 33 (Lahore Sh. M. Ashraf 1984). 142.

would expect to see in an ideal leader. We can often see that in the human sphere a leader may not be the person who is out in front, leading the way; for example, a shepherd herds his flock from behind, standing back, watching, monitoring and make adjustments when necessary. However, a spiritual leader is necessarily someone who leads from the front, setting an example for others to follow, plotting the course and braving the storm when the tide is against him, trying to shield his followers from the worst of the onslaught. We can examine this topic more by looking at the essential characteristics of true leaders from both present and past, as well as referring to relevant occasions and examples for each characteristic from the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

An ideal leader addresses all aspects of humanity; mind, spirit, feeling and emotion, whilst also raising the capacity of their followers to the highest level. A leader has detailed knowledge and understanding of his followers, able to detect and utilize their skills and capabilities, mindful at the same time of their limitations. He is able to help them reach their potential and utilizes their skills in the areas that will be most beneficial.⁴

An ideal leader effects positive change in his followers, removing bad habits, addictions and immoral values, and inspiring moral and universal values in their place. The true leader not only teaches through words but also through example. He embodies his teachings and acts on his ideals and aspirations. More than ever, a leader has a strong character and embodies praiseworthy virtues such as being dignified, modest, upright, truthful, trustworthy and just. A real leader identifies and acknowledges the importance of communication, consultation and soliciting the ideas and opinions of his followers. He does not act solely on his own ideas and decisions but rules in a collaborative way. In this way, he does not lose the trust of his followers because trust is like the soul, once lost, it is gone forever.⁵

A leader is a person of action who never hesitates in implementing plans and decisions as this would lead to mistrust and disunity in his followers who would become disheartened and disengaged from him. Strong willpower and unfailing determination is an inherent characteristic of a true leader. He never feels hopeless. A true leader is both pragmatic and practical and never contradicts realities, hence his messages should not contradict reality. He should understand the dominant prevailing conditions of his time and be aware of its advantages and disadvantages.

True leaders do not espouse to power and influence and abuse their authority to gain worldly pleasures and wealth. They show humility and are not arrogant. Their view of leadership is that of service to their people rather than of ruling over them. They never discriminate amongst their followers; rather, they strive to love them, prefer them over themselves, and act so that their people will love them sincerely.

Characteristics of the Leadership of Prophet Muhammad

Having defined the characteristics we expect of a true leader we now turn our attention to expanding on these qualities by citing examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). At the time when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was born amongst the Quraysh tribe in Arabia, the region was isolated from its neighbors by vast open deserts on the Middle Eastern Peninsula. Socially it was considered as one of the most backward regions of the world, in terms of its cultural, intellectual, and moral standards. Immorality, licentiousness and permissiveness were common in the society; Arabs drank wine, gambled, and indulged in all manner of evil activities such as robbing, stealing, and murdering.⁶ Even the simplest disputes could incite inter-tribal fighting, sometimes developing into local wars which then spread to neighboring tribes expanding into the inter-related tribal hierarchy on the peninsula. These were the tense and sorry

⁴ Fethullah Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, (New Jersey: The Light 2005), 274.

⁵ Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, 65.

⁶ Recep Dogan, "Muhammad" in; "Spiritual Leaders Studies in leadership for a pluralist society", edited by Seforosa Carroll and William W Emilsen, (Canberra, Australia: Barton Books, 2014) 115.

conditions when Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) appeared among them. Within a short period of time, with limited means and facing intense and aggressive opposition, he completely eradicated barbarism and savagery in the Arabian Peninsula and embedded all the praiseworthy virtues in the hearts of the people who both lived and traversed through the area.⁷

His unparalleled influence and swift popularity were neither achieved through domination and physical force nor through military action or design; he simply embodied his teachings through his actions and then put his actions into words. As a result, his preaching became immediately accepted by his followers, it penetrated the hearts of all those he came into contact with. His unique gift was to gain the love and confidence of his people by becoming the beloved of their hearts, the teacher of their minds, the trainer of their souls, and the ruler of their spirits. During his prophethood he purified them of their immoral habits and traditions and, through his teachings, instilled in their hearts moral values in such a way that they became second nature.

Respect for Other Faiths

Worthy leaders are respectful of other people's ideas and faiths, however different they are to their own. Even though they may not agree with some of their opinions, they listen with tolerance and care, mindful of not causing offence to anyone. Debates should take place in an environment that promotes interfaith dialogue, mutual respect and friendship with different religions. With this purpose, God commanded Muhammad (pbuh) to engage in interfaith dialogue with the people of scriptures;

Say (to them, O Messenger): "O People of the Book, come to a word common between us and you, that we worship none but God, and associate none as partner with Him, and that none of us take others for Lords, apart from God."⁸

This call, made by Islam 14 centuries ago to the People of the Book (Christians and Jews), is still being made them and to people of learning today and is of great significance. The verse shows how various consciences, nations, religions and books can unite on one essential concept and word of truth, and how Islam has instructed the human realm in such a wide, open and true path of salvation supported by laws of freedom.⁹

During Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) time he was visited by a group of Christians to learn about Islam. They requested permission from him to perform their rituals in the *masjid* (place of worship for Muslims known also as a mosque), which he granted. Later, they had an open debate in the *masjid* during which the Prophet (pbuh) explained the tenets of Islam and tried to convince them of their veracity; at no point did he resort to force.

This debate resulted in a peace treaty with the Christians encompassing the following details:¹⁰ Christians have the right to live in safety, their property will be protected, their churches will not be harmed, monasteries will not be closed and priests will not be impeded when performing their duties. Moreover, Christians will not be compelled to provide supplies for Muslims during times of war and it is not permitted to interfere with or interrupt Christian worship. It is recorded that the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) visited Christian churches and Jewish synagogues in order to foster understanding and put an end to the inter-religious enmity and hatred.¹¹

⁷ M. Fethullah Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*. (New Jersey, USA: The Light Publishing, 2005) 274.

⁸ Qur'an (3:64)

⁹ Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, vol. 2 (İstanbul Azim Dağıtım, 2007). 1131.

¹⁰ Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabarī, *Jami al-Bayan an Ta'wil al-Qur'an* Vol. 3, (Beirut: Ālam al-Kutub 1992), 162-163.

¹¹ Ibid.

On another occasion, a funeral procession passed by a group of Muslims who were sitting with the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On seeing the procession, he stood up in respect and his Companions followed his example. Then they said to him, rather puzzled, ‘O Allah’s Apostle! This is the funeral procession of a Jew’; thereupon the Prophet (pbuh) said, ‘Isn’t he a human being?’¹² This example shows that interfaith dialogue is not limited to Arab or non-Arab people, rather religious progress is possible by expanding universally and in unison and not by being separate from one another. There is no place for repulsive manners, condemnation or rudeness in conveying the Islamic message.¹³

The Jews of Medina invited Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to dinner or lunch several times and each time he gladly accepted their invitation.¹⁴ In his dealings with people he never discriminated between them on the grounds of religious preferences and through his own behavior he was showing how Muslims should treat the People of the Book. They are entitled to live under Muslim rule with rights and justice without being persecuted or insulted in a way unbecoming to a Muslim.¹⁵

Politics of Consultation and Counseling

The true leader brings and teaches universal values which are compatible to human nature, seeking happiness not only for his own followers exclusively, but for all of humanity. These universal values can address all the needs of human kind, provide them with real happiness and can unite human kind in peace in an environment which is accepting of all races, religions, intellects, ages and occupations.

After emigration to Medina, the new Muslim community faced various problems. One of these was increasing tension between the Muslims, Jews and other minorities. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) showed true leadership in solving this problem. He signed a pact with the Jewish community, known by scholars as Medina’s first constitution. The pact ensured the rights of citizenship for all minority groups in Medina and confederated the Muslims and Jews as two separate communities. This document not only helped to reduce tensions within the city, it shows Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a conciliator, one who is able to bring people together for the good of the city. He did not discriminate or marginalize people from different backgrounds, faiths and ethnic groups; rather he embraced them all under the same common pact. This legacy lives on in the Islamic practice of being open and accepting of others without needing to try to change or impose Islamic beliefs and values.¹⁶

Consultation is extremely important in Islam, especially in public affairs. When we examine the life of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) we can find many examples of this. The Prophet (pbuh) established this principle among his followers by consulting them even about his personal affairs; he said: “Whoever takes counsel, does not regret it in the end.”¹⁷

The Prophet (pbuh) never showed any hesitation in putting his plans or decisions into action as such an act would have caused confusion in his followers. Despite always acting with the utmost caution and consulting others, after deciding on a strategy he implemented it immediately. A good example of this is the Treaty of Hudaibiya. In 6 A.H., Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) told

¹² Muhammad ibn Ismail Bukhari, *Al-Jāmi’ Al-Sahih, Iman* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997), 50.

¹³ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Reflections on the Qur’ān: Commentaries on Selected Verses* (New Jersey: Tugra Books Publishing, 2012). 68.

¹⁴ Ahmad bin Hanbel, *Musnad*, vol. 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2012). 210.

¹⁵ Ahmet Kurucan & Mustafa Kasim Erol, *Dialogue in Islam Qur’ān, Sunnah, History* (London, UK: London Dialogue Society, 2012). 73.

¹⁶ M. Fethullah Gulen, *Toward Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (New Jersey, USA: The Light Publishing, 2006). Page number?

¹⁷ Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī ibn Abī Bakr al-Haythamī, *al-Majma’ al-Zawaid wa Manba’ al-Fawait*, (Beirut, Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah 2001). 2/ 280.

his Companions of a dream which had indicated they would soon enter the Holy Mosque in Mecca in security, with their heads shaved or their hair cut short. His Companions, especially the Emigrants (those who had originally emigrated from Mecca to Medina), were delighted. During that year, the Prophet (pbuh) left Medina with 1,500 unarmed men in *ihram* (pilgrim dress) with the intention of visiting Mecca and performing pilgrimage. However, the ruling Quraysh tribe took the necessary precautions to prevent the Prophet (pbuh) and the Muslims from entering the city. After lengthy deliberation, meetings and discussions with the Quraysh leaders, the Prophet (pbuh) signed a treaty with them. Initially detested by his closest followers it was only some months later that his prophetic wisdom was manifested.

A true leader achieves the love and loyalty of his people, as did Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He gave abundantly to the leaders of the Quraysh from the war booty in order to establish real peace in their hearts. He gave 300 camels and 250 pounds of gold and silver to Abu Sufyan and his family, 200 camels to Hakim ibn Hizam, and 100 camels each to Nusayr ibn al-Harith, Qays ibn Asiyy, Safwan ibn Umayya, Malik ibn Awf, Akra ibn Habis, and 'Uyayna ibn Hisn.¹⁸ Understandably, other of the longer-serving Muslims from Medina were unhappy with this situation. They saw their old adversaries being rewarded whilst they remained relatively poor and could not understand the actions of the Prophet (pbuh). It was a serious problem requiring quick action to solve it. The Prophet (pbuh) held a meeting with the Muslims of Medina (*Ansar*/the Helpers) to explain his thinking and test their loyalty and confidence in him. When the Muslims gathered, the Prophet (pbuh) began to speak:

O Community of the Helpers! I hear that you are displeased with me. Were you not in misguidance when I came to you? And has God not guided you to the truth through me? Were you not in poverty when I came to you? And has God not enriched you through me? Were you not in internal conflicts when I came to you? And has God not reconciled you through me?¹⁹

They answered all these questions as: "True, O God's Messenger! We are indebted to God and His Messenger!" These words were enough for the *Ansar* (the natives of Medina who had become Muslim) to burst into tears, and all of them responded with one voice: "We are content with God and His Messenger! We desire nothing else!"²⁰ In addressing the *Ansar* alone, as they were the offended party, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) endowed on them a special honor which won their hearts and solved the conflict. It also prevented any ill-will among the Emigrants (originally from Mecca), who had been forced to immigrate to Medina, or the new Muslims of Mecca, many of whom were still to be won over. His speech, when considered in its Arabic original, is an extraordinarily eloquent rhetorical document.²¹

His Demeanor towards His Followers

The Prophet (pbuh) displayed a remarkable ability to appoint the best people for the correct job. His judgment of their skills, abilities and limitations meant he never had to change their appointed position because he always chose the most suitable one. An example of this is the case of Abu Dharr, a very poor, yet an upright Bedouin who never hesitated to declare his faith openly. When he heard Muhammad's (pbuh) declaration of prophethood, he went to Mecca and converted to Islam. Despite his piety Abu Dharr did not display ability for public administration, as he lacked the required skills; due to this Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not grant his appeal

¹⁸ Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, 95-97.

¹⁹ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, Chapter *Manāḡib al-Ansār*: 1:2.

²⁰ Bukhari, *Ibid*.

²¹ Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, 96.

for a position of ruling. He told him: “You cannot manage the people’s affairs. Do not apply for such jobs, for we do not assign such jobs to those who apply for them”.²²

When he encountered problems, rather than being inflexible or stern, the Prophet (pbuh), solved them with compassion and passion. The following case clearly illustrates his compassion and understanding in the most awkward and challenging situations of obstinacy:

One day, a young man (Julaybib) asked God’s Messenger for permission to fornicate, since he could not control himself. Those who were present reacted in various ways; some scoffed at him, whilst others pulled his robe. But the Prophet asked him to approach and then he spoke to him gently. He began by asking: “Would you let someone do this with your mother?” to which the young man replied: “Of course not, O Messenger of God, may my mother and father be sacrificed to you!” The Prophet said: “Naturally, no one would wish such thing upon their mother”. He then continued asking Julaybib the same question, but this time using the sister, wife and aunt as an example. Each time Julaybib replied that he would not agree to such an act. By the end of the conversation, Julaybib had lost all desire to fornicate. Then the Prophet prayed for Julaybib by placing his hands over his chest: “O God, forgive him, purify his heart, and maintain his chastity.” Following the Prophet’s prayer Julaybib became a role model of chastity and he was martyred in a battle. After his martyrdom, the Prophet said: “This one is of me, and I am of him.”²³

Rather than being a leader who simply addressed practical concerns, the Prophet (pbuh) recognized that people have many faculties with their own inherent needs, including the mind, intellect, heart, and soul. Ever wary of these intrinsic and inherent human faculties, the Prophet (pbuh) sufficiently satisfied the needs and wants of his followers resulting in their complete loyalty and acceptance of him as their leader and solver of their problems. They combined speech with action, knowledge with practice, and action with contemplation and therefore there was no higher rank in faith left for them to attain.²⁴

True and good leaders are inspirational for their followers. They gain their love and trust, and their confidence in them is so great, they are willing to follow them and endure all kinds of hardships.²⁵ This was also true for Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his followers. Following severe persecution in their native Mecca, the Muslims undertook a migration (*hijra*) to Medina. This event was a significant turning point in the history of Islam and was of such importance that the second Islamic Caliph (leader of the Muslim world), ‘Umar, pegged it as the start of the Islamic (*hijri*) calendar. The Emigrants from Mecca were called the *Muhajirin* whilst those who welcomed them so warmly in Medina, were known as the *Ansar* (the Helpers).

On settling in Medina, the Prophet’s (pbuh) first task was to build a mosque. He recognized the importance of the *masjid* as a focal point for the unity of the Muslims. Having a place of worship to gather five times a day for the ritual prayers would increase their solidarity and unity. It also gave the Prophet (pbuh) a natural meeting place for instruction in the newly revealed verses and rulings. Additionally, the *masjid* was the Prophet’s (pbuh) university, the multipurpose center of the new Islamic nation as well as the parliament for the nascent Islamic government.

After arriving in Medina, the Prophet (pbuh) encouraged and established strong ties of brotherhood between the Emigrants and the Helpers to achieve a sincere relationship between them.²⁶ An example of the strength of these bonds was in the conversation Sa’d ibn Rabi, a

²² Muslim ibn Hajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Saḥīḥ Muslim* (Dar al-Ma’rifah, Beirut : Imara, 1994) 16/17.

²³ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Chapter Fadāil Saḥābah: 131.

²⁴ Gulen, *The Messenger of God: Muhammad*, 261-265.

²⁵ Adair, *The Leadership of Muhammad*, 108.

²⁶ Muḥammad b. Mani’, Ibn Sa’d, *al-Tabaqaat al-Kabīr* Vol 1 (New Delhi: Kitāb Bhavan, 1981) 238.

native of Medina, had with his migrant brother Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Awf: 'Brother, you have left everything in Mecca. This house, with everything in it, belongs to both of us now'.²⁷ This bond of brotherhood was so deep, sincere and strong that the Helpers shared everything they owned with the Emigrants. The Emigrants became uncomfortable with this situation. They feared that by accepting such generous hospitality, they were using up the rewards they were hoping to receive in the afterlife. They appealed to the Prophet (pbuh) for guidance:

O Messenger of God! We migrated here purely for the sake of God. But our Helper brothers are so good to us that we fear we will consume in this world the rewards of our good deeds, which we expect to receive in the Hereafter. Also, we feel very indebted to them. Please ask them to let us go so we could earn our own living.²⁸

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) did not make the decision alone. He invited the Helpers to discuss the situation and explained to them what the Emigrants were asking for. The Helpers opposed unanimously; the idea of separation from their brothers was unbearable to them. Eventually, a solution was arrived upon; the Helpers agreed to the Emigrants working in their farms and gardens in return for wages until they could build their own houses.²⁹ Thus a solution which benefited everybody without causing any bad feeling, was found after a period of listening and consultation.

Muhammad Eschews and Abolishes Racism

Ironically, more than 1000 years after Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) delivered his final sermon in which he expressed the equality of all races; racism is still one of the most difficult problems of our time. Blatant discrimination against other races, for example the slaves transported from Africa to Europe and the Americas, continued for many decades, and today bonded slavery is still prevalent in many countries even in the developed world. When Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was born, such racism was also widespread in Mecca where the Quraysh considered themselves superior to all other tribes and people.

Throughout his life and prophethood, Muhammad (pbuh) championed the cause of equality. His final sermon delivered a very strong message:

All mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action³⁰ and: 'Even if a black Abyssinian Muslim were to rule over Muslims, he should be obeyed'.³¹

It was not just through his words but also his actions that enabled Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to remove racism and discrimination so successfully and effectively. An example of this is the words of 'Umar: 'Bilal is our master, and was emancipated by our master Abu Bakr'.³² Bilal was black but 'Umar had given him the title: *our master*. Zayd ibn Haritha was a black slave emancipated by the Prophet (pbuh) and had been his adopted son before the Revelation banned such adoption. The Prophet (pbuh) helped Zayd to marry Zaynab bint Jahsh, one of the noblest women in Arabia. In addition, he selected Zayd as the commander of the Muslim army when they were sent to fight the Byzantine Empire at a time when such leading and experienced Companions as Abu Bakr, 'Umar, Ja'far ibn Abū Tālib, and Khalid ibn Walid were among the

²⁷ Bukhari, *al-Jāmi' al-Sahīh*, Chapter Manāgib al-Ansār: 3.

²⁸ Bukhari, *Sahīh*, Chapter Hibah: 35.

²⁹ Muslim, *Sahīh*, Chapter Jihad: 70.

³⁰ Ahmad bin Hanbel, *Musnad* Vol 5 (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2012), 441.

³¹ Muslim, *Sahīh*, Chapter Imara: 37.

³² Ibn Hajar, *al-Isāba*, vol.1, 65.

soldiers.³³ Through such practices, the Prophet (pbuh) imprinted in the hearts of the Muslims that superiority is not by birth or color or blood, but through morality and piety.

Respect for Women

Islam, often criticized in the West for its attitudes towards women, was actually emancipating for women who had, only two decades earlier, been deemed valueless with their daughters even buried alive. It is unjust to judge Islam's view towards women based on how it is practiced in Muslim countries today, rather we should look at the behavior of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) towards women to understand how they are expected to be treated in Islam.

Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was very respectful towards women and protected their rights, encouraging his Companions to do the same. During his prophethood, women started to experience true love, honor and respect through the Islamic teachings. They were given rights previously denied them and these were put into action by the Prophet (pbuh) himself. He once said: "The most perfect believers are the best in character, and the best of you are those who are kindest to their wives".³⁴

He warned his followers one more time regarding women rights in his farewell sermon;

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. So treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers.³⁵

In his manners towards women, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was very polite and friendly, wishing them to be comfortable and not worry about their behavior. 'Umar reported:

One day I went to the Prophet and saw him smiling. "May God make you smile forever, O Messenger of God," I said, and asked why he was smiling. "I smile at those women. They were chatting in front of me before you came. When they heard your voice, they all vanished." On hearing this answer, I raised my voice and told them: "O enemies of your own selves, you are scared of me, but you are not scared of the Messenger of God, and you don't show respect to him." "You are hard-hearted and strict," they replied.³⁶

The Prophet (pbuh) was a living example of how women should be treated. Even though he was directed by God in all his actions, he took the time to consult his wives and asked their opinion, thus showing them love and respect and illustrating the level women were to hold. This was significant in an area and people where women had never been given such regard.

Warm Environment to Build Real Friendship

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was a spiritual leader, a skilled military leader, a leader of society, the best teacher and a judge. At the same time, he was a warm human being with a wonderful sense of humor which he often used to boost the morale of his followers and build friendship and support. The Prophet's (pbuh) humor was based on truth. There are many examples which are typical of how he playfully used his humor to lighten the atmosphere.

Once he summoned Anas, one of his followers with humor saying 'Come here you, the man with two ears!'³⁷ Anas was delighted at the Prophet's (pbuh) lightheartedness. Anas served the

³³ Muslim, *Saḥīḥ*, Chapter Fadā'il Saḥābah: 63.

³⁴ Abu Dāwūd, *Sunan, Sunnah*, 15.

³⁵ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ*, Chapter Hajj: 1623.

³⁶ Bukhari, *Saḥīḥ, Adab*, 68.

³⁷ Abū Isa Muḥammad Tirmidhi, *al-Sunan at-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1980), Chapter Manāgib: 45.

Prophet (pbuh) voluntarily for ten years and during these years he never heard a harsh word from him.

On another occasion the Prophet (pbuh) told a lady that her husband had a white spot in his eyes. The lady was very sad when she went to the side of her husband to relate this. Her husband told her that the Prophet (pbuh) had teased her and that he actually meant that everyone has a white spot in their eyes.³⁸

Once, an old woman went to the Prophet (pbuh) asked for Paradise. The Prophet (pbuh) replied: "Old women do not enter Paradise" upon which the woman started crying. As she made to leave the room, the Prophet (pbuh), showing his subtle sense of humor, stopped her and said, "Old women will become young before entering heaven."³⁹

Zahir was a Companion of the Prophet (pbuh) who used to trade in metal objects. Once, when the Prophet (pbuh) was passing by the market, he saw Zahir, playfully grabbed him from behind and said, "Will anyone buy this slave?" Zahir laughed and said, "O Messenger of God, whoever buys this slave will be in loss." The Prophet (pbuh) smiled and said, "In God's eyes, your value is high."⁴⁰ On another occasion a man approached the Prophet (pbuh) and asked him for a camel. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "I would give you a camel's calf". The man said, "O Messenger of God! What will I do with a camel's calf?" The Prophet (pbuh) smiled and said, "Is there any camel who is not the progeny of a camel?"⁴¹

It was with his grandchildren, Hasan and Husayn that the Prophet (pbuh) joked the most. He used to hold their hands, place them on his feet and then lift them to his bosom and hug and kiss them. Sometimes he would even carry them on his shoulders. One day while he was going to a meeting, he ran into Husayn who was playing on the street. He stopped in front of him, opened his arms and called him but Husayn ran away playfully. Then the Prophet (pbuh) ran after him laughing and caught him. Then he kissed and petted him.

We can see from these few examples that as well as being a capable leader in every sense the Prophet (pbuh) was a dear friend, relative and beloved companion. His sense of humor brought warmth and love to those who were around him. He never passed someone without a smile.

Conclusion

At least three attributes contribute to Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) success as a leader. His charismatic character attracted people to him and, combined with his unattested trustworthiness, this was an appealing combination. He always served the truth and opposed anything untruthful and life-destroying such as self-destructive habits, addictions and immorality. He earned the love and devotion of his people dealing with their daily social and economic problems as well as greater concerns and so earned their trust and respect. He also shared the people's hardships and dangers. He listened carefully and consulted colleagues before making decisions.

Secondly, Muhammad (pbuh) was able to bring out the best in his followers by listening to them, understanding their characters and acting accordingly. He showed no favoritism among his followers and always strived to put others before himself. As a leader, Muhammad (pbuh) did not abuse his power and authority for personal gain. He led with humility and was always focused on the greater good. Most importantly, Muhammad's (pbuh) confidence in his message and mission, his determination and character gave people hope. He embodied his teachings and gave others the perfect example to aspire to.

Finally, the Caliphs embodied the ideals they had witnessed in their leader and this ensured the continuing success of the young Islamic state and cemented the exemplary leadership style of

³⁸ Muhammad b. Muhammad al- Ghazālī, *Ihyā' Ulūm al-Din* Vol 3 (Cairo: Islamic Inc for Publishing & Distribution, 1997), 129.

³⁹ Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Chapter Manāqib: 42.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Abd al-Rahman al-'Arifi, *Enjoy Your Life* (Riyadh; Darussalam, 2008),352.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Muhammad (pbuh) as the ideal lifestyle to follow and emulate. This legacy was passed on to further generations by his closest Companions who were dedicated in their recording and close observance of the specific actions and sayings (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet (pbuh). One of the greatest legacies the Prophet (pbuh) has left Muslims and the world is his respect for people of other religions, cultures and ethnicities and an appreciation of the dignity of all living beings irrespective of their gender, race or status. The Prophet (pbuh) was a living example of his teachings and strongly believed that a leader must first be prepared to practice his or her own personal beliefs before expecting others to follow and practice them.

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The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society aims to create an intellectual frame of reference for the academic study of religion and spirituality, and to create an interdisciplinary conversation on the role of religion and spirituality in society. It is intended as a place for critical engagement, examination, and experimentation of ideas that connect religious philosophies to their contexts throughout history in the world, places of worship, on the streets, and in communities. The journal addresses the need for critical discussion on religious issues—specifically as they are situated in the present-day contexts of ethics, warfare, politics, anthropology, sociology, education, leadership, artistic engagement, and the dissonance or resonance between religious tradition and modern trends.

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The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal.

ISSN 2154-8633

